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ABSTRACT

For hundreds of years, central and western New York had been inhabited by the six member nations of the Iroquois Confederacy. During the colonial period, the French, Dutch, and British coveted its strategic location along an important fur trade route. The Mohawk Valley's rich farmland also yielded great quantities of food, and the land attracted European settlers. When war broke out, Europeans living in the United States and the Iroquois fought each other for control of New York's political power, land, and commerce. A brutal civil war in the Mohawk Valley occurred on August 6, 1777, the Battle of Oriskany. Neighbor fought neighbor and transformed a quiet ravine into a bloody slaughterhouse. This lesson is based on the National Register of Historic Places files "Oriskany Battlefield" and "Fort Stanwix," primary accounts, and other sources. The lesson can be used in U.S. history, social studies, and geography courses in units about the Revolutionary War and North American Indian history. It cites relevant U.S. history standards, objectives for students, and materials needed. The lesson is divided into eight sections: (1) "About This Lesson"; (2) "Getting Started: Inquiry Question"; (3) "Setting the Stage: Historical Context"; (4) "Locating the Site: Maps" (18th-Century Travel in New York State; Iroquois Confederacy; Northern Campaign of 1777; Oriskany Battlefield); (5) "Determining the Facts: Readings" (Growing Tensions in Central New York; Battle of Oriskany; Effects of the Battle of Oriskany); (6) "Visual Evidence: Images" (Joseph Brant, 1786; Sir John Johnson, 1770s; Battle of Oriskany); (7) "Putting It All Together: Activities" (Where Do I Stand; Lost Battlefield; In the Grip of Fear); and (8) "Supplementary Resources." (BT)

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Teaching with Historic Places

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The Battle of Oriskany: "Blood Shed a Stream Running Down"

"That the late Incursions of the Enemy & their Savages into the said county [Tryon], & upon a part of the County of Albany have reduced the Inhabitants to the utmost distress. The Harvests not yet gathered in are rotting upon the ground. The Grass uncut. The fallow Grounds not yet ploughed. The Cattle in a great measure destroyed."[1]

(Courtesy of Utica Public Library)

For hundreds of years, central and western New York had been inhabited by the six member nations of the Iroquois Confederacy. During the colonial period the French, the Dutch, and the British coveted its strategic location along an important fur trade route. The Mohawk Valley's rich farmland also yielded great quantities of food, and the land attracted European settlers. By the time of the Revolutionary War, Dutch, German, Irish, Scotch, and British settlers prospered from lucrative trade and productive farms.

Yet the whole area suffered from long-established prejudices and hatred between groups and individuals. When war broke out, European Americans and American Indians fought each other for control of New York's political power, land, and commerce. The sentiments quoted above would be repeated time and time again as personal vendettas and reprisals escalated to bloody massacres and battles. No episode better captures the brutal civil war in the Mohawk Valley than the Battle of Oriskany on August 6, 1777, where neighbor fighting neighbor transformed a quiet ravine into a bloody slaughterhouse.

[1]*William Harper and Fredrick Fisher to Gov. George Clinton, August 28, 1777 from* Public Papers of George Clinton, Vol. 2 *(Albany: State of New York, 1900).*

This lesson is based on the Oriskany Battlefield State Historic Site and Fort Stanwix National Monument, two of the thousands of properties listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Both properties have been designated National Historic Landmarks.

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About This Lesson

This lesson is based on the National Register of Historic Places registration files "Oriskany Battlefield" and "Fort Stanwix", accounts of people who lived during this period, and other source materials. *The Battle of Oriskany* was written by Mike Kusch, Chief of Visitor Services, and Susan Jones, Park Ranger, both at Fort Stanwix National Monument. The lesson was edited by Jean West, education consultant, and the Teaching with Historic Places staff.

Note to Educators: Because the terms used to describe the people who fought in the American Revolutionary War can be confusing and misleading, this lesson refers to those who fought for the American cause as "Rebels" rather than "Patriots" and those who fought for the British cause as "Tories" rather than "Loyalists."

It is also important to discuss the meaning of the word "savage," which appears in the primary sources quoted in the lesson. In the 18th century, people frequently called American Indians savages as a way of identifying them apart from European Americans. The word savage in its negative connotation was applied to any person, regardless of ethnic or racial background, who did not conform to European standards.

Where it fits into the curriculum

Topics: The lesson could be used in U.S. history, social studies, and geography courses in units on the Revolutionary War and American Indian history. It also could be used in courses on conflict resolution, cultural diversity, and art.

Time period: Late 18th century.

Relevant United States History Standards for Grades 5-12

Era 2: Colonization and Settlement (1585-1763)

- Standard 1B– The student understands the European struggle for control of North America.

Era 3: Revolution and the New Nation (1754-1820s)

- Standard 1C– The student understands the factors affecting the course of the war and contributing to the American victory.
- Standard 2C– The student understands the Revolution's effects on different social groups.

Objectives for students

1) To evaluate the decisions several New Yorkers made about which side to support during the Revolutionary War.

2) To analyze the Battle of Oriskany to determine whether the Tories or the Rebels won the battle.

3) To determine what effects the Battle of Oriskany had on the American Revolution as a whole and on the subsequent history of the region.

4) To apply the historic lessons of Oriskany and Central New York to contemporary issues in their own community.

Materials for students

The materials listed below either can be used directly on the computer or can be printed out, photocopied, and distributed to students.

1) four maps showing the geography of the area, the Iroquois Confederacy, and the British Campaign of 1777;

2) three readings compiled from historic documents and more recent histories;

3) three paintings of key people discussed in the lesson.

Visiting the site

The Oriskany Battlefield State Historic Site is located in New York on Route 69 between the Town of Oriskany and the City of Rome. It is preserved by the New York State Department of Parks, Recreation and Historic Sites - Central Region. For more information, contact Oriskany Battlefield State Historic Site, 7801 State Route 69, Oriskany, NY 13424.

Fort Stanwix National Monument, administered by the National Park Service, is located in downtown Rome, New York at the intersections of Routes 69, 26, 49, and 46. For more information, contact the Superintendent, Fort Stanwix National Monument, 112 E. Park Street, Rome, NY 13440, or visit the park's Web site at http://www.nps.gov/fost/. Both sites are closed for part of the year due to winter snow, so please contact them before visiting.

Getting Started
Inquiry Question

What time period is represented in this painting?
Why do you think so?

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How to Use the Inquiry Question

Begin each lesson by asking students to discuss possible answers to the inquiry question that accompanies the Getting Started image. To facilitate a whole class discussion, you may want to print the page and use it to make an overhead transparency. The purpose of the exercise is to engage students' interest in the lesson's topic by raising questions that can be answered as they complete the lesson.

Rather than serving merely as illustrations for the text, images are documents that play an integral role in helping students achieve the lesson's objectives.

To assist students in learning how to "read" visual materials, you may want to begin this section by having them complete the Photo Analysis Worksheet for one or more of the photos. The worksheet is appropriate for analyzing both historical and modern photographs and will help students develop a valuable skill.

Photo Analysis Worksheet

Step 1:

Examine the photograph for 10 seconds. How would you describe the photograph?

Step 2:

Divide the photograph into quadrants and study each section individually. What details--such as people, objects, activities--do you notice?

Step 3:

What other information--such as time period, location, season, reason photo was taken--can you gather from the photo?

Step 4:

How would you revise your first description of the photo using the information noted in Steps 2 and 3?

Step 5:

What questions do you have about the photograph? How might you find answers to these questions?

Setting the Stage

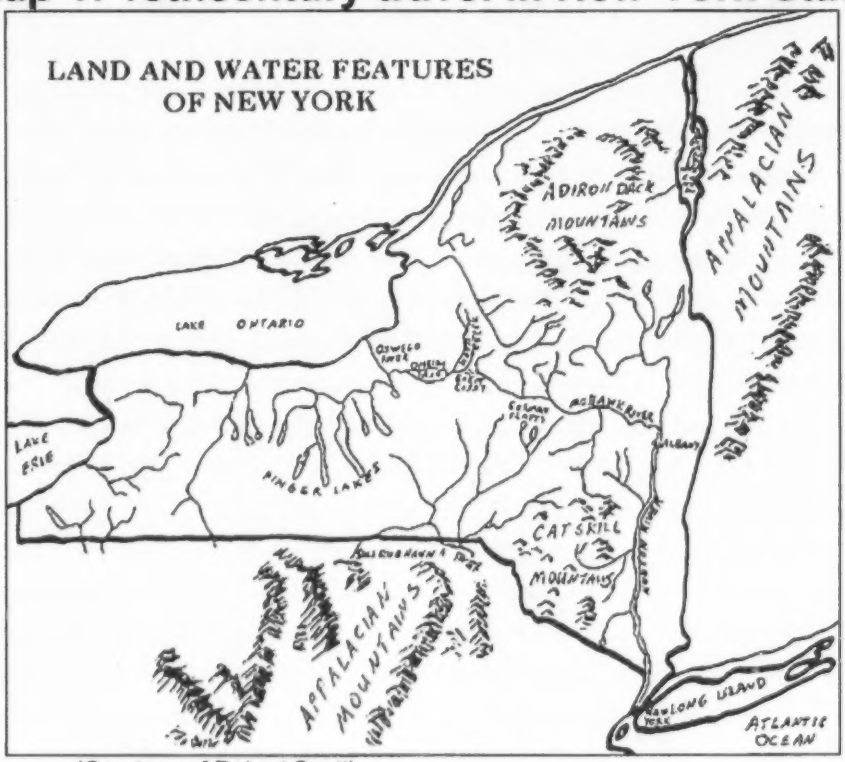
With the outbreak of hostilities in 1775, it became clear that New York was vital to military victory. If the British could defeat the Rebel forces in New York, they would control trade between the Atlantic Ocean and the Great Lakes and divide the colonies. They also would be able to feed their troops from the bounty of the Mohawk Valley, the "bread basket" of the Revolutionary War.

In 1777, the British conceived an ambitious plan for the conquest of New York. This plan called for a three prong attack into the heart of the colony with all three invading forces meeting in Albany. The first army, led by General John Burgoyne, was to invade New York moving south from Canada through the Lake Champlain–Hudson River corridor to Albany. The second force, to be commanded by General William Howe, was to move north up the Hudson River Valley from New York City to Albany. The third and final British troops, commanded by General Barry St. Leger, were to move down Lake Ontario from Canada to Oswego, New York and hook eastward through the Mohawk Valley towards Albany.

This plan was dependent on coordination between the armies and the anticipated rallying to arms of the large Tory population the British believed existed in New York. Rebel leaders in New York prepared to defend the state and reinforced the Mohawk Valley. At the ravine of Oriskany in August 1777, the two sides clashed for control of New York.

Locating the Site

Map 1: 18thcentury travel in New York State



(Courtesy of Robert Scott)

The Mohawk River travels east through central New York into the Hudson River at Albany. The Hudson River flows south into the Atlantic Ocean at New York City. Wood Creek, one mile to the west of a bend in the Mohawk River, is the entry into a continuous water connection westward to Lake Ontario via Oneida Lake and the Oswego River.

A major break in a continuous water route from the Atlantic Ocean to the Great Lakes in colonial times was the gap between the Mohawk River and Wood Creek. This break ranged between one and six miles depending on the season and the amount of water in the river and creek. Eighteenth-century travelers could portage, or carry, their small water craft over this piece of level ground located in the territory of the Oneida Nation.

Questions for Map 1

1. Examine Map 1. What features blocked travel and trade from the Atlantic at New York City to the Great Lakes? What features made travel and trade between the Atlantic and the Great Lakes easier?

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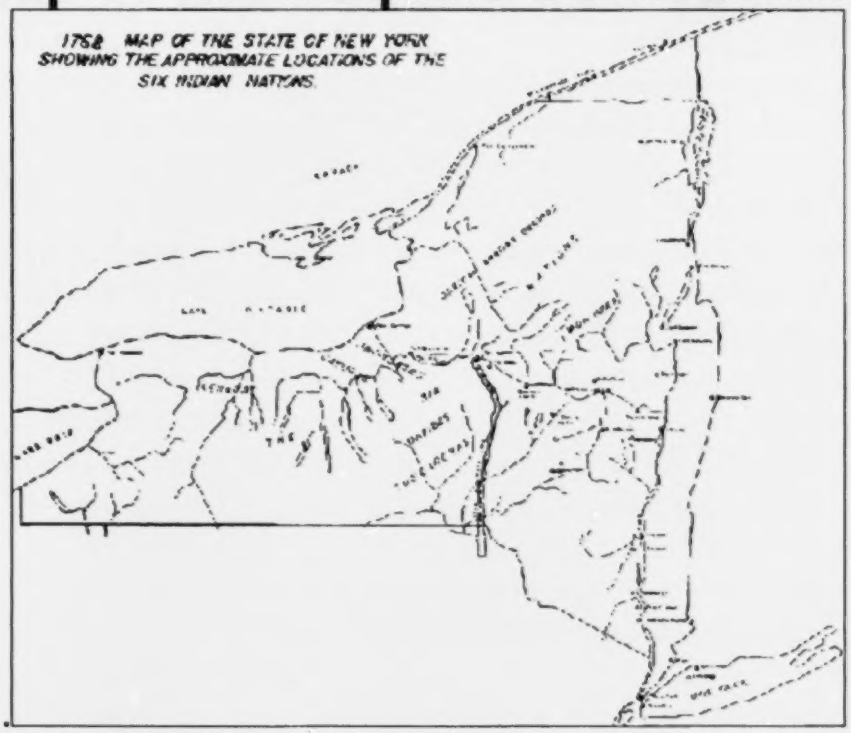
2. Beginning at New York City, trace the Hudson River to Albany and the Mohawk River until it turns north. Then, beginning at Lake Ontario, trace the Oswego River east to Oneida Lake, and then north to Wood Creek. Why do you think the gap between the Mohawk River and Wood Creek is labeled "Great Carry"?

3. What kinds of travel and trade could have been conducted on this water and land route between the Atlantic Ocean and the Great Lakes?

4. If possible, locate a current New York State road map. How do the modern automobile routes compare to the 18th-century water routes?

Locating the Site
Map 2: The Iroquois Confederacy



(Courtesy of Robert Scott)

The Great Carry trade route was located in the lands of the Oneida Nation. The Oneida Nation was part of the Iroquois Confederacy which also included the Mohawk, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca Nations. The Tuscarora Nation was the sixth and last to join the Iroquois Confederacy. At the outbreak of the French and Indian War, British officials recognized the importance of protecting the trade route and portage, so they built several small forts on either end of the Great Carry. In 1757, the French attacked the forts along the Great Carry and in German Flatts. Realizing that the small forts were inadequate, the British built one large fort, Fort Stanwix, to secure the area.

As colonists settled in New York, they encroached on the Confederacy's territory. To resolve the growing tensions, a Boundary Line Treaty was negotiated in 1768 at the site of old Fort Stanwix. In this treaty, delegates from the Iroquois Confederacy and the Delaware and Shawnee Nations ceded land to the British King to create a clear line beyond which the colonists could not settle.

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Questions for Map 2

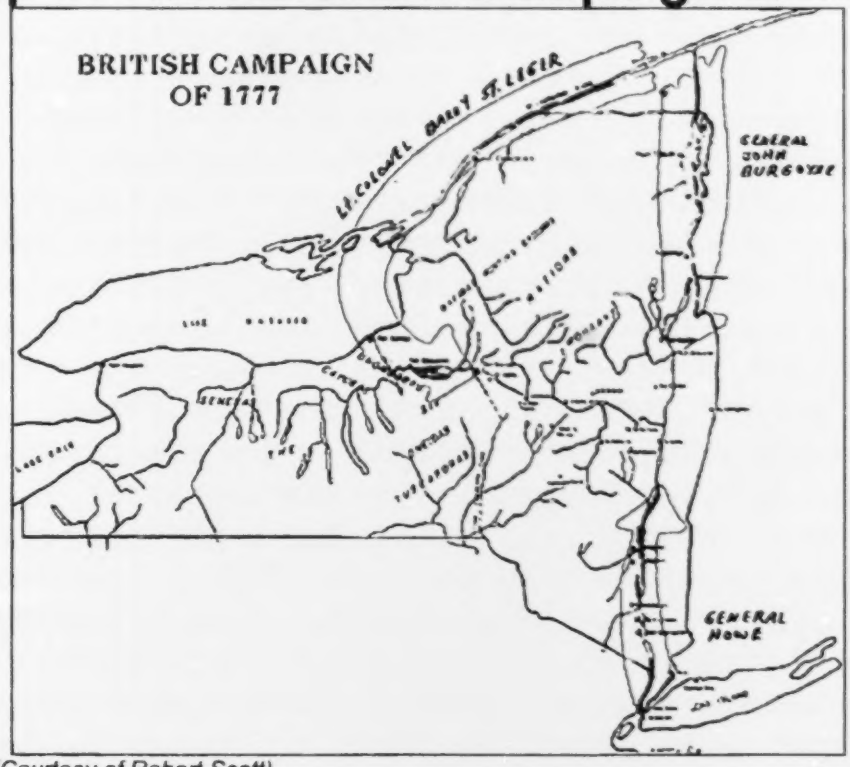
1. Which of the six nations of the Iroquois Confederacy was located farthest to the east? Which was located farthest to the west?

2. What fort was built at the Great Carry, by whom, and why?

3. Why do you think the treaty line of 1768 was not drawn due north and south, but bends to the west of Oriskany and Fort Stanwix?

4. The boundary line of 1768 was highly controversial. If you were of the Mohawk, Oneida, Tuscarora, Shawnee, or Delaware Nations, how would you feel about the Boundary Line Treaty of 1768? If you had moved from Europe to America for the freedom to live anywhere you wanted, how would you feel about the Boundary Line Treaty of 1768?

Locating the Site
Map 3: The Northern Campaign of 1777



(Courtesy of Robert Scott)

For centuries the Iroquois, French, Dutch, British, and American-born colonists all prospered from the trade through the Mohawk Valley. During the Revolutionary War this important transportation route and source of food became a military prize in the battle for control of New York and Britain's North American colonies.

Questions for Map 3

1. What geographical features aided Burgoyne's invasion from Canada? What geographical features aided Howe's invasion from New York City? What geographical features aided St. Leger's invasion from Canada? Refer to Map 1 to identify what obstacles the British were attempting to avoid.

2. Which of the three British forces most closely followed the trade route along the Oneida Carry?

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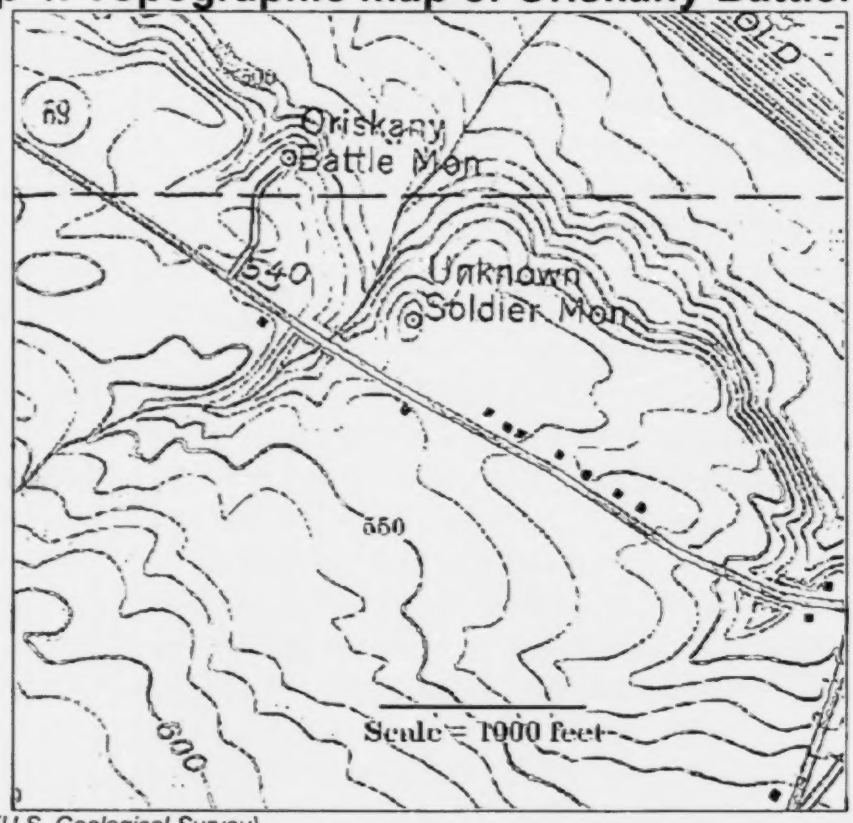
3. Locate Fort Stanwix (Schuyler) on the maps. The Oriskany Battlefield is located 6 miles east of the fort on the south side of the Mohawk River. Why do you think there was a battle here?

4. St. Leger's forces included New York Tories of European heritage and Indian allies from the Six Nations. Howe's forces were predominantly British regulars. Which force, St. Leger's or Howe's, do you think was motivated to move more quickly in their advance, and why?

Locating the Site

Map 4: Topographic map of Oriskany Battlefield



(U.S. Geological Survey)

Questions for Map 4

1. Locate the creek on this map.

2. Locate the line which marks 500 feet above sea level and trace it along the map. Locate the line which marks 550 feet above sea level and trace it along the map. At what altitude above sea level is the Oriskany Battle Monument? At what altitude above sea level is the Unknown Soldier Monument?

3. On a topographic map, the closer the lines are, the steeper the angle of the land is. Locate the ravine around the creek. About how deep is the ravine, measuring from the 500 foot level at Oriskany Creek to the level of the Unknown Soldier Monument?

4. Using the scale, estimate the length of the ravine.

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Determining the Facts

Reading 1: Growing Tensions in Central New York

The tensions that existed between the people of central New York during the colonial era are well documented. While Swedish scientist Peter Kalm was on a botanical expedition in 1749-1750, he wrote about the relationship between the English and Dutch colonists:

> The hatred which the English bear against the people at Albany is very great, but that of the Albanians against the English is carried to a ten times higher degree. This hatred has subsisted ever since the English conquered this section, and is not yet extinguished, though they could never have gotten larger advantages under the Dutch government than they have obtained under that of the English. ...They are so to speak permeated with hatred toward the English, whom they ridicule and slander at every opportunity. [1]

In the 1757, Thomas Butler, member of an English family that held large amounts of land in New York, corresponded with Sir William Johnson, another great English landholder and Superintendent of Indian Affairs:

> I have often Said and do Yet That if any Troubles Shou'd arise between the Six Nations and us it will in Great Manner Or intirely be owing to bad ignorant people of a difrant Extraction from the English that makes themselves too busey in telling idle Stories. I fear we have too many of those who Speak the Indian Tongue More or less and dont Consider the Consequence of Saying we are Dutch and they are English that they had a fight Together last winter in Schenectady. the Dutch there beat the English. The quarrell was because they wou'd not allow the English To be Masters and take from them all they had. that the English wanted to drive them about like dogs, this Story I imagin proceeded from a small dispute between the battoe Men and Soldars last fall, and the English are Severe on the people at albany taking from them what they pleas breaking open their doors when they will, had forced Capt. Herkemer out of his House.[2]

Sir William Johnson was aware of other tensions between the English and German settlers, including prominent German immigrant Johan Jost Herkimer (or Hercheimer) with whose family Johnson's family had often quarreled. He worried about the alarming sale by the Germans of large quantities of rum to the Iroquois Confederacy and the wedge it was driving between the British authorities and the Six Nations, when he wrote to James Abercromby in 1758:

> I believe Sir I have the Honour of your Concurrance in Opinion that for the present at least, it will be both Politick and prudent not to indulge the

> Indians with a Trade at the German Flats. In a Message I have just sent to the Six Nations, part of which is on this Subject, I have told them that you do not incline, to trust the Lives and properties of His Majestys Subjects to the Assurances of those, who late Experience shows are either not able or not willing to fulfill them, and that at Albany and Schenectady they are welcome to come and trade.
>
> I have many Reasons to believe, and many Informations to strengthen, that some Germans are interfering with the Indians in a way that will be very prejudicial, and may perhaps be fatal to His Majestys Service.[3]

After the French and Indian War had ended, Great Britain sought to gain stronger control of the colonies and started to impose taxes on the colonists to reduce Britain's enormous national debt incurred while fighting the war. Rival groups, because of ethnic, religious, or economic differences, began to align themselves politically. In general, those who became Rebels were fighting for the right of self-governance and freedom from British control. Those who chose to be Tories, on the other hand, were fighting to maintain their ties with Great Britain and the British King. There were also cases where people simply preferred to keep things the way they were, and fought to maintain the status quo, so were Tories by default. The explosive mixture of old grudges with the political and philosophical arguments of the revolutionary era turned New York into a powder keg.

Once hostilities broke out in 1775, New Yorkers were forced to choose sides. Upon the death of Sir William Johnson in 1774, his son John inherited a 200,000 acre estate and, in later years, also became Superintendent of Indian Affairs. Sir John Johnson chose to be loyal to Great Britain and gathered ammunition and raised a militia group called the "King's Royal Regiment of New York."

Nicholas Herkimer, son of Johan Jost Herkimer, a wealthy German-American trader and owner of 2,000 acres of land, chose the Rebel cause. In 1776 Nicholas Herkimer was made a Brigadier General in the New York State militia and charged with defending the state against Tories and Indians. Herkimer and General Philip Schuyler, with their Rebel militia, forced Johnson's militia to disarm and disband. Johnson fled for Canada, fearful that he would be arrested for his Tory beliefs. Ironically, Nicholas Herkimer's brother, Han Yost Herkimer, chose the Tory cause and became a Captain in the Indian Department; the Herkimers were one of many families split by New York's civil war.

One apparent exception to the rivalries in colonial New York appeared to be the Iroquois Confederacy. For 500 years the six nations of the Iroquois Confederacy had mutually supported and protected one another. However, continued European settlement along the New York frontier had generated tensions between the Confederacy and European settlers. In 1768, in an attempt to set a boundary line to solve this chronic problem, the British convened a meeting at Fort Stanwix, which had been abandoned following the French and Indian War

and was in disrepair. As many as 3,000 delegates from the Iroquois, Shawnee, and Delaware Nations met with the representatives of the King of Great Britain. Instead of resolving tensions, the boundary line divided the Iroquois Confederacy into factions, some opposed and others allied with the King and Great Britain.

At the outbreak of the American Revolution, the Iroquois Confederacy had to decide whether to support one side or the other as a single confederacy or whether to allow each of the six member nations to decide individually. The Onondaga Nation was the keeper of the Central Council Fire, the symbol of the Iroquois Confederacy's 500 years of unity. Although they urged continued unity and neutrality, the six tribes could not agree on a single course of action. The Central Council Fire was then extinguished due to deaths of sachems and chiefs caused by disease. Iroquois unity was irrevocably broken. British and Rebel diplomats courted the favor of the individual tribes, hoping to get them to support their side or remain neutral. The Mohawk, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca Nations chose to support Great Britain. Although originally neutral, by July 1777, the Oneida and Tuscarora Nations would support the Rebels. There were many individuals who did not choose to accept the decision of their respective nations, so both Tories and Rebels counted among their forces members of all six nations.

Mohawk Joseph Brant, or Thayendanega, was a relative of Sir John Johnson. His sister, Mary (Molly) Brant, became the common law wife of Sir William Johnson after the death of John's mother. British educated and a member of the Anglican Church, Brant supported the Tory cause and eventually received a British Officer's commission as a captain. Just 37 days before the Battle of Oriskany, General Herkimer and Rebel militia troops went to investigate claims that Joseph Brant was attempting to raise Tory troops for an impending attack on the Mohawk Valley. On June 29 and 30, 1777 Herkimer met with Brant and unsuccessfully attempted to persuade him to stay neutral during the war. By August 1777, sides had been chosen, the participants were armed, and the stage was set for the first major battle between Tories and Rebels.

Questions for Reading 1

1. Develop a chart to track key people and groups discussed in the reading. Across the top of the chart list the headings: Sir John Johnson, Nicholas Herkimer, Joseph Brant, Indian Tories, Indian Rebels, Germans, Dutch, English. Down the side of the chart make these headings: Allies, Enemies, Events, Goals. Take notes on the chart. Did the goals and friendships (or hatred) of the people and groups influence which side they supported before the Revolutionary War? During the Revolutionary War?

2. What were the tensions that developed between the various people who lived in central New York? Between the European-Americans?

Between the six nations of the Iroquois Confederacy? Between the European-Americans and the Iroquois Confederacy?

3. Why was it important for European-Americans to maintain good relations with the Iroquois Confederacy?

4. What about New York's physical location made its control essential to both Rebels and Tories? What made central New York strategic for both European-Americans and the Iroquois Confederacy? What about Fort Stanwix made it a strategic frontier post?

5. Why do you think the individuals and groups decided to support the sides they did during the Revolutionary War? What impact do you believe these decisions had on their lives and the lives of those around them? How did these decisions impact the Iroquois Confederacy?

Reading 1 was adapted from James T. Flexner, Mohawk Baronet: A Biography of Sir William Johnson *(New York: Harper, 1959); Barbara Graymont,* The Iroquois in the American Revolution *(Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1972); Isabel T. Kelsay,* Joseph Brant, 1743-1807: Man of Two Worlds *(Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1984); Philip Ranlet,* The New York Loyalists *(Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986); and W. Max Reid,* The Mohawk Valley: Its Legends and its History, 1609-1780 *(New York: G. P. Putnam's & Sons, 1901).*

[1]*Peter Kalm,* Peter Kalm's Travels in North America *(New York: Dover Publishing, 1966), 346.*
[2]*Thomas Butler to Sir William Johnson, April 7, 1757,* Sir William Johnson Papers, Vol. 2 *(Albany: The State of New York, 1922), 701-702.*
[3]*Sir William Johnson to James Abercromby, June 1, 1758,* Sir William Johnson Papers. Vol. 9 *(Albany: State of New York, 1922), 919.*

Determining the Facts

Reading 2: The Battle of Oriskany

When the Revolutionary War broke out, the New York Rebels recognized the importance of the Oneida Carry and the fertile Mohawk River Valley. They rebuilt the ruined Fort Stanwix at the urging of General Philip Schuyler of Albany. Colonel Peter Gansevoort took command of the fort in the spring of 1777 and garrisoned it with about 700 New York and Massachusetts infantry soldiers.

In July 1777, General Barry St. Leger left Canada and arrived at Oswego, New York. St. Leger was ordered to move east and join Burgoyne. He left Oswego on July 26 in command of a force of 700 to 800 British regulars, Canadians, Mohawk Valley Tories (commanded by Sir John Johnson and Colonel John Butler), and Hanau (German) mercenaries. These soldiers were joined by approximately 800 American Indian Tories, mostly from the Mohawk and Seneca tribes, under the command of Joseph Brant. Fort Stanwix, which had been renamed Fort Schuyler by the Rebels, blocked St. Leger's path. St. Leger's advance troops arrived at the fort on August 2nd and decided it was too strong and well-garrisoned to attack. After Gansevoort rejected his demand to surrender on August 3, St. Leger prepared for a siege.

General Nicholas Herkimer, hearing about St. Leger's invasion and the siege of Fort Schuyler, assembled approximately 800 Rebel militia troops from Tryon County and some Oneida scouts. He set out on August 4th from Fort Dayton (30 miles east of Fort Schuyler) to reinforce Gansevoort and relieve the siege.

Molly Brant, the common law Mohawk wife of Sir William Johnson and sister of Joseph Brant, sent word to St. Leger on August 5th that the relief force was only 10 to 12 miles away from Fort Schuyler. St. Leger dispatched a detachment of Mohawk Valley Tories and Indian allies under the command of Sir John Johnson, John Butler, and Joseph Brant to ambush the Rebel militia before it could reach Fort Schuyler.

The Tories chose an ambush point 6 miles east of Fort Schuyler, not far from the Oneida village of Oriska. Dense virgin forest provided excellent concealment for Johnson's forces around a ravine where an old military road descended to cross marshy little Oriska Creek. Brant's American Indian Tories took up position on the high ground along both sides of the road. The King's Royal Regiment of New York and other Tories of European extraction positioned themselves across the road in the ravine. This created a U-shaped pocket for the rebel militiamen to enter. Johnson planned to close the open, eastern end of the trap with Seneca Tories, once all of the rebel militia had passed the Senecas' position.

On the morning of August 6, 1777, General Nicholas Herkimer was supposed to join the attack against the British siege camp upon hearing three cannon shots from Gansevoort. Pushed by his junior officers to move his troops immediately and accused of being a Tory for delaying, Herkimer decided to march his troops to the fort without waiting for the signal.

Oneida scouts out front and to the sides of the Rebel militia detected no enemy so General Herkimer led the vanguard of 600 men into the ravine. Fifteen supply wagons followed, and then the 200 soldiers of the rearguard. At approximately 10:00 a.m., as Herkimer completed crossing the ravine, the Seneca Tories attacked. They were slightly premature, because the final 200 militia troops of the rearguard were not yet in the ravine. Nonetheless, the first volley, coming from all sides, was devastating to the Rebel militia. General Herkimer was shot through the right leg and his horse was killed. The militia defended themselves in a desperate, disorganized manner. Brant's men engaged in handtohand combat, using knives, hatchets, clubs, and spears to attack the Rebels. The battlefield was littered with dead, dying, and wounded soldiers. The 200 Rebel troops not caught in the trap fled from the ravine, only to be followed and attacked by Joseph Brant and other Mohawks.

Seneca war chief Blacksnake described the battle years later:

> We met the enemy at the place near a small creek. They had 3 cannons and we none. We had tomahawks and a few guns, but agreed to fight with tomahawks and scalping knives. During the fight, we waited for them to fire their guns and then we attacked them. It felt like no more than killing a Beast. We killed most of the men in the American's army. Only a few escaped from us. We fought so close against one another that we could kill or another with a musket bayonet.... It was here that I saw the most dead bodies than I have ever seen. The blood shed made a stream running down on the sloping ground.[1]

Although bleeding from his wound, Herkimer organized his men into a rough circle so they could defend themselves in all directions. About 45 minutes into the battle, a violent thunder storm interrupted the fighting. During this reprieve, the Rebels fought their way up a hill to high ground where they could better defend themselves. General Herkimer was carried up the hill and sat on his saddle under a tree. He directed his troops to reorganize in a grove of trees by pairs, so that one man could defend the other while he was reloading his musket. After the storm, the fighting resumed.

Colonel Gansevoort sent out a sortie under the command of Colonel Marinus Willett between 2 and 4 p.m. to create a diversion to help Herkimer's force. After driving off the guards, Willett and his men raided the Indian and Tory camps, taking several wagonloads of booty and some prisoners back to the fort and destroying what they could not take.[2] Hearing of the raid, the Native-American

Tories started to leave the battle and return to the siege camp. Without Indian support, the European-American Tories also withdrew from the battlefield. After six hours, at about 4 p.m., the battle was over. The Rebel militia troops then collected their wounded, abandoned the dead without burying them, and returned to Fort Dayton.

Only about 150 of the 800 Rebels who went into battle survived without serious injury. General Nicholas Herkimer died 11 days after the battle due to complications from having his leg amputated. Many Rebels were taken prisoner by the Tory American Indians. Tory losses were much lighter than those of the Rebels, the majority having occurred among the Indian allies, particularly the Senecas.

Major General Benedict Arnold had been sent from Saratoga to relieve Fort Schulyer even before news of Herkimer's battle. The column skirted Oriskany battlefield and as Arnold approached, St. Leger's Native American allies, discouraged by the failure of the siege, abandoned him. St. Leger lifted the siege early on August 22 and retreated to Canada. Both Tories and Rebels claimed victory at the Battle of Oriskany. Herkimer's attempt to relieve the siege at Fort Schuyler was unsuccessful, but St. Leger's expedition failed.

In the aftermath of the Battle of Oriskany, the Oneida Village of Oriska and its crops were destroyed, and many of its occupants killed. Molly Brant, who notified St. Leger about the approach of Herkimer's column, was forced to flee her home. It was looted and subsequently given to Oneida chief Hon Yerry, who had fought alongside his wife for the Rebel militia at Oriskany. These types of reprisals would be played out again and again, for the Battle of Oriskany was just the beginning of the civil war to be fought throughout New York until 1784.

Questions for Reading 2

1. Why do you believe the casualties at the Battle of Oriskany were so great?

2. Give examples of good and poor leadership displayed by General Herkimer and explain your choices.

3. Give examples of good and poor leadership displayed by Sir John Johnson and explain your choices.

4. Who do you believe won the battle? Why?

5. How could St. Leger have conducted his campaign differently and treated his Tory allies and the people of the Mohawk Valley differently that might have resulted in a British victory?

Reading 2 was adapted from Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole, editors, The Blackwell Encyclopedia of the American Revolution *(Cambridge, Mass.: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1991); Don Higginbotham,* The War of American Independence: Military Attitudes, Policies, and Practice, 1763-1789 *(New York: Macmillan, 1971); Lois M. Huey and Bonnie Pulis,* Molly Brant: A Legacy of Her Own *(Youngstown, N.Y.: Old Fort Niagara Publications, 1997); John S. Pancake,* 1777: The Year of the Hangman *(Tuscaloosa, Al.: The University of Alabama Press, 1977); and George F. Scheer and Hugh F. Rankin,* Rebels and Redcoats: The Living Story of the American Revolution *(Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1957).*

[1] *Lyman Draper, Draper Manuscripts, Series U (Frontier War Papers, Vol. 11, Unpublished manuscript in the State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison) 196-7.*

[2] *John F. Luzader,* Fort Stanwix: Construction and Military History, 1758 to 1777 *(Washington, DC: Office of Park Historic Preservation, National Park Service, 1976) 44-45.*

Determining the Facts

Reading 3: Effects of the Battle of Oriskany

The retreat of General St. Leger returned the Mohawk Valley to an uneasy peace which would not last for long. In late August, General Benedict Arnold offered to pardon any Tories who turned themselves in and joined the Rebels saying:

> Whereas a certain Barry St. Leger a Brigadiergeneral in the services of the -------- George of Great Britain, at the head of a banditti of robbers, murderers, and traitors, composed of savages of America, and more savage Britons (among whom is noted Sir John Johnson, John Butler, and Daniel Claus) have lately appeared in the frontiers of this State, and have threatened ruin and destruction to all the inhabitants of the United States. They have also, by artifice and misrepresentation, induced many ignorant and unwary subjects of these states, to forfeit their allegiance to the same, and join them in their crimes, and parties of treachery and parricide.[1]

Pierre Van Cortland, writing to New York Governor George Clinton on August 25, 1777, was confident that the British strategy to capture New York was failing:

> I have great reason to believe that Genl: Burgoyne will soon follow the example of St. Leger, and my greatest fear is that he will be equally fortunate in getting off without a second drubbing, as the militia do not turn out with that alacrity which might be expected. A proper spirit on this occasion would enable us totally to destroy the enemy in the quarter, and secure peace and safety to this part of the country. The enemy are in our power, could the militia only be prevailed on to believe it.[2]

Van Cortland was correct that the British force led by General Burgoyne would not succeed; on October 19, 1777, after failing to break through the Rebel lines protecting Albany, and suffering from lack of supplies, General Burgoyne surrendered his entire army at Saratoga. General Howe never committed his full army to the third thrust up the Hudson Valley, but instead attacked Philadelphia.

New York was no longer threatened by three British armies, but it continued to suffer the trauma of civil war. Sir John Johnson and Joseph Brant returned to the Mohawk Valley with their Tory forces repeatedly, raiding and destroying villages, crops, and livestock, and massacring enemies and innocents alike. The Rebels retaliated on Tory strongholds, most notably when General Sullivan led his troops through western New York destroying everything in his wake. When the Oneidas

requested that neutral Onondaga villages be spared, their pleas were ignored and they were destroyed along with villages aligned with the Tories.

In 1783, the Treaty of Paris ended the war between the United States and Great Britain. It was followed in 1784 by the Treaty of Fort Stanwix which ended the war between the United States and the Iroquois Confederacy. The ancestral lands of the Oneida and Tuscarora Nations were preserved and protected by the federal government under the terms of this treaty, in recognition of their support during the American Revolution. However, the Mohawks, Onondagas, Cayugas, and Senecas were confined to a small reservation, punished for supporting the Tory cause.

Although New York was enjoying true peace again, Tories of European and American Indian heritage were faced with a difficult decision, either to remain in the new United States and accept its government or to leave the country. While some Tories chose to stay in the United States, many moved. Some went to the British and Caribbean Islands, but the vast majority moved to Canada and settled there on lands granted by Great Britain. Today there are still large numbers of Canadians of European and Native American extraction who can trace their ancestry to the United States and the Revolutionary War. Descendants from the tribes that made up the Iroquois Confederacy have worked for years to restore their lost unity and relight the Central Council Fire.

Questions for Reading 3

1. Find out about Benedict Arnold's career. Re-read his address to the Tories of New York. Does it help you to understand his character better? If so, how?

2. How do you think the people in central New York reacted to news of the Battle of Oriskany? Consider each of the following groups in your answer: German, Dutch, European-American Tories, American Indian Tories, American Indian Rebels.

3. How did the battle affect life in central New York for the remainder of the war?

4. What do you think was the significance of the Battle of Oriskany to central New York? To the outcome of the Revolutionary War? To the fate of the Iroquois Confederacy? To world history? Why?

5. Which groups benefited the most from the Rebel victory and American independence in the short term? Explain your answer.

6. Which groups benefited the most from the Rebel victory and American independence in the long run? Explain your answer.

Reading 3 was adapted from Barbara Graymont, The Iroquois in the American Revolution *(Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1972); Isabel T. Kelsay,* Joseph Brant, 1743-1807: Man of Two Worlds *(Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1984); Philip Ranlet,* The New York Loyalists *(Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1986); and W. Max Reid,* The Mohawk Valley: Its Legends and its History, 1609-1780 *(New York: G. P. Putnam's & Sons, 1901).*

[1] *John Luzader,* The Construction and Military History of Fort Stanwix *(Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1969) 52.*
[2]*Pierre Van Cortland to Gov. George Clinton, August 25, 1777,* Public Papers of George Clinton *(Albany: State of New York, 1900) 253-254.*

Visual Evidence
Painting 1: Joseph Brant, 1786.
Painted by Gilbert Stuart.

(Courtesy New York State Historical Association)

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Painting 2: Sir John Johnson, 1770s. Artist Unknown.

(Courtesy Johnson Hall State Historic Site)

Painting 1 is a portrait of Joseph Brant, Mohawk "brother-in-law" of Sir William Johnson. Painting 2 is a portrait of John Johnson, son of Sir William Johnson, painted in the 1770s. Both of these men held powerful positions in the Mohawk Valley at the beginning of the American Revolution. Both were Tories who raised troops for the British cause in New York, and both died in exile in Canada after 1800.

Questions for Painting 1 and 2

1. To have one's portrait painted in the 18th century was a sign of power and status in society. What evidence do you find in Joseph

Brant's painting of power and status? What evidence do you find in John Johnson's painting of power and status?

2. Molly Brant was the common-law Mohawk wife of Sir William Johnson. She held a higher position in Iroquois society than her brother Joseph and yet there are no known portraits of her. What might this lack of visual evidence suggest about EuropeanAmerican views of the status of women in 18thcentury society?

3. What details in the portraits reveal the very different cultural origins of the two men depicted?

Visual Evidence
Painting 3: Battle of Oriskany.
Painted by Frederick C. Yohn, 1977.

(Courtesy of Utica Public Library)

This painting was commissioned to commemorate the bicentennial of the Battle of Oriskany.

Questions for Painting 3

1. Make a list of actions occurring in this painting. What action or actions seem to be the most important based on the way the artist has composed this picture?

2. How can you tell from this composition that an ambush is going on? Which army is the artist depicting? Who do you think the central figure in the painting is intended to represent? Why do you think the artist depicted him after he was wounded rather than before?

3. What emotions are depicted in this painting? Compare the emotions depicted by the artist with those expressed in the original accounts in Reading 2. Do you think the artist captured the feelings of the combatants of Oriskany? When you look at this painting, what emotion or emotions does it cause you to react with?

Putting It All Together

All the events prior to and during the American Revolutionary War in central New York are interrelated, and these had profound effects on the people who lived there. In these activities, students will compare their lives in their community to what it would be like to live in central New York during this time. Students will also explore what it was like to be at the Battle of Oriskany.

Activity 1: Where Do I Stand?

Ask each student to select one of the historical people who participated at the Battle of Oriskany and create a report in the character of that person about the experience. The report may be written or oral. Once the student has identified what person they are portraying and explained why that character was selected, the student should answer the following questions in character:

1. What do you (the person you are roleplaying) believe in? What do you support?

2. What do you oppose?

3. What are your hopes and dreams?

4. What are you feeling before this battle? Are you angry, sad, happy or a mixture of these? Are you worried or anxious about yourself and your family? Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the outcome of the battle?

5. Place yourself in the battle. Where are you located, in the ravine or on the hilltop? What do you see, hear, smell and feel? Who do you see? What are you doing? What are your feelings? Are you afraid, angry, or confused or a mixture?

6. After the battle, how do you feel? Are you worried or anxious about your family? What do you see in your immediate or long-term future? Has your outlook changed? Have your hopes and ambitions changed? Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future?

Activity 2: The Lost Battlefield

The Oriskany Battlefield has been lost over time. The land is still there, however, the old Military Road is gone, the virgin woodland forest has been clear cut, and exact placements of everyone on the battlefield can not be reproduced. Except for letter and journal entries, some written shortly after the battle and others collected long after the battle (which sometimes are conflicting) there is little to

tell us exactly where and how the battle was fought. There is also little physical evidence available to help researchers evaluate the reliability of these accounts.

Students are going to be asked to recreate the Battle of Oriskany. They should keep a written journal or recorded oral log about the investigative and production phases of the project. After students have completed studying the quotes in the readings, looked at maps of the area or colonial illustrations depicting military clothing and weapons, and completed additional personal research, ask them to complete one of the following activities:

1. As an historical cartographer, find the ravine and high ground, and then draw a map or series of maps of Oriskany battlefield during the battle's different phases.

2. As an historical illustrator, sketch or paint a picture or series of pictures of the Battle of Oriskany.

3. As a re-enactor or documentary film-maker, create costumes, re-enact the battle, and videotape the re-enactment. Edit the tape and add voice-over narration for final presentation.

Activity 3: In the Grip of Fear

Ask the students to produce a written, pictorial, or video report describing a controversial issue which has divided their community. Point out that community can be interpreted in many ways and may be their school, sports teams, parent groups, school board, local government, or state government as well as the nation or world. The students will have to use investigative research techniques and questioning strategies to find the answers through review of local newspapers, committee reports, and personal interviews. Students may want to record their data on a chart like the one used in Reading 1. Ask them to identify what the controversy is, and then answer the following questions:

1. Is there only one central issue that is causing the controversy, or are there several issues?

2. What was the history of the community before the controversy? Are there events in the past which affect the issue(s) today?

3. Who are the key leaders on both sides of the issue? Why have they taken the stand they have taken?

4. What is the general social make-up of the followers of these leaders? Where are they from? In which part of the community do they live? What is their social, political and economic standing?

What are their race, ethnicity, and sex? What types of jobs do they have? Where do they stand on the issue and why?

After the students have completed this activity, have them ask the same questions about the Mohawk Valley civil war and then compare and contrast the contemporary controversy they have studied with the Mohawk Valley civil war. Alternatively, the students may want to compare the controversy they have studied with the U.S. Civil War, regional civil wars in the U.S. (such as in "Bleeding Kansas"), or civil wars on the international scene (such as in Rwanda and Kosovo in the 1990s or China in the 1940s).

The Battle of Oriskany: "Blood Shed a Stream Running Down"-- Supplementary Resources

By looking at *The Battle of Oriskany: "Blood Shed a Stream Running Down,"* students learn how the Battle of Oriskany and the Mohawk Valley Civil War effected the Revolutionary War as a whole as well as the subsequent history of the region. Those interested in learning more will find that the Internet offers a variety of interesting materials.

National Park Service Resources:

Fort Stanwix National Monument http://www.nps.gov/fost/
Fort Stanwix National Monument is a unit of the National Park Service. The park's Web pages detail the history of the park, supply visitor information, and offer a set of 4th grade lesson plans.

Lighting Freedom's Flame: American Revolution Web Page
http://www.nps.gov/revwar/
The National Park Service maintains it own American Revolution Web page, which provides a listing of the park units with connections to the Revolutionary War and colonial America, information on special activities in the parks celebrating the 225th anniversary of the war, and a timeline of events in the pivotal year of the American Revolution, 1777.

The American Battlefield Protection Program
http://www2.cr.nps.gov/abpp/index.htm
The National Park Service's American Battlefield Protection Program promotes the preservation of significant historic battlefields associated with wars on American soil. The program's Web page provides detailed online publications featuring different topics about the American Revolution.

Other Resources:

Colonial Albany Social History Project
http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/albany/welcome.html
This Web site includes information on the leaders and common people of Albany at the eve of the Revolutionary War. It contains biographical information about Tories and Rebels, and transcriptions of documents such as the Sons of Liberty Constitution.

The Oneida Nation http://www.oneida-nation.net/ http://www.oneida-nation.net/cultureindex.html
The Oneida Indian Nation's Web site includes a Culture and History segment that examines the role of individual Oneidas, such as George Washington's cook, Polly Cooper, and the tribe as a whole during the American Revolution. Also included on the site is the text of the Treaty of Fort Stanwix and information on the Oneidas' role in the Battle of Oriskany.

Library of Congress http://memory.loc.gov/
For a variety of resources on the American Revolution, Fort Stanwix, and the Battle of Oriskany, search the Library of Congress's American Memory collection.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

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